

TRANSCRIPT

Susie Verkamp Interview

Recorded February 26, 2009 at Grand Canyon's 90th Anniversary Celebration and the Grand Opening of Verkamp's Visitor Center

Shannan: This is Ranger Shannan here at the Verkamp's Visitor Center where we are celebrating the 90th anniversary of Grand Canyon National Park and the grand re-opening of the Verkamp's Curio Shop as Verkamp's Visitor Center.

It's a little noisy in here. So, we're gonna move to a quieter space; and then, we'll meet up again.

We found ourselves a quieter spot to sit and talk to some folks. With me right now, is Susie Verkamp. She actually grew up in this building; and for those of you who haven't seen it: they've created displays in the building that talk about the sense of community, the concept of people using this as their home for literally thousands of years.

So, one of the first things I want to ask her is, "when you think of the Grand Canyon as home, what is the first thing, the first story that comes to mind for you?"

Susie: Well, there's so very many stories, um...but I do have a...a memory of something that to me really characterized a lot of what it was like growing up here when I grew up here. There were just so many things that we...that the whole community did together. We would go sledding on the various streets. They would actually close off a couple of the streets for sledding; and everybody would go sledding, the whole community!

We had over in the community building...um...there were many community events, talent shows, the school programs.... In many ways, like a lot of other, you know, small towns in the US.

One of the things that I think about is that we had all the kind of benefits of a small town growing up and... the benefits AND detriments of living in a small town. But we also had the entire world, you know, passing by the front door and around all the time. So, it is this interesting combination of things.

And I think one of the unique things about Grand Canyon village as a community that makes it very unique is that we do have schooling, one through 12. To my understand it's the only high school inside of park boundaries and so...so much of life revolved around the schools, you know, the activities of the schools support the sports. And I remember when I was in high school our basketball team went down and won state; and the tournament was held down at NAU in flagstaff; and I don't think there was ANYBODY left in Grand Canyon, you know, the entire...

Laughter.

Shannan: Who was running the park?

Susie: Yeah...the entire...the entire town was there, you know; and so, I think that's a unique...a unique thing.

To me one of the real blessings, too, was, like I said, just growing up and just going to school all through the years with primarily Supai, Hopi and Navajo people, and you know, just a

really pretty diverse population for such a small community. And we were all just in involved in everybody's life, day in day out, and...uh...sort of this commonality, I think, of the community itself; and then, you're constantly, like I said, interacting with a larger public and...and that...there's something about that that gives a unique personality to the in-park comm.

Shannan: Nice. OK.

Susie: ...'cause they're not just like an insular community.

Shannan: Yeah.

Susie: ...in the middle of Kansas or something.

Shannan: No. They're very exposed.

Susie: Yeah.

I think there's a quality here, I'm sure it's still true, where you have this interesting flux in this community between people, especially like Native American people who have traditionally lived in this area literally for thousands of years and many of whom are employed in the park and work in the park and then, like, the park staff come to the park and then leave and come from other places and then the seasonal employees who come in; and all of that blends to make this a really unique community.

But when I tell people that I grew up... I'll say, "I grew up in grand canyon." And they'll say, "what do you mean grand canyon? Is there a town there?" And I say, "yes, you know..."

Shannan: Yes

Susie: "Well, where did you go to school?" And, "well, there was a high school there."

I think this concept of park communities as places where people live and raise their children and all that is...is something that really peaks people's curiosity because for most people they're just a place they come to visit and not live.

Um...So those are some thoughts.

Shannan: Thank you so much!

Susie: That good enough?

Laughter

Shannan: It's great! Thank you!

Those are awesome! There's so many wonderful things in there.

Susie: OK.

Shannan: Thank you. I really appreciate it.